

DECLASSIFIED  
PA/HO Department of State  
E.O. 12958, as amended  
April 21, 2005

Telcon  
The President  
1/14/70; 5:40

[Omitted here is information unrelated to Nigeria.]

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K: Rogers has asked whether you objected if he went to Nigeria.

P: I don't ~~xxx~~ object except for one thing. I don't want to have that Lagos government on the back when this Gowon is making speeches that are as strong as that. Tell him he has got to make a judgement on where he goes but tell him I think he has got to deal very strongly. Did you know they have had a demonstration in Rome. The Catholics. The Belgians are going to try to fly in some help. Basically we are talking about religious. This is a Catholic thing. ~~Does~~ Gowon refers to us as having blood on our hands?

K: No, he talks about these voluntary relief organizations.

P: I think the way with Bill -- we don't want to argue about it. You could just say to him look Bill, the President has confidence in you. But you must make a cold judgment on this. Here is where we need that Vatican ambassador. I would like to know what the ~~xx~~ Vatican feels about this. Don't we have some responsibility for 400 million people? They are starving aren't they?



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K: Yes, Mr. President, every week they kill a few tens of thousands of people.

P: I don't think they feel we are going sort of ~~being~~ hind-tit to Wilson and sucking around that government. Tell Bill if he announces he is going to Lagos he should do it on the basis that he wants to go and be of assistance. If he could play it that way. The purpose is not to go and then back down in front of [REDACTED] Gowon. But certainly the Nigerians have got us where the hair is short. If they don't let us in we can't get in. I think Bill ought to play that cold and help the Nigerians too.

K: A lot of the State Dept people here say by our being so active this weekend that Gowon ~~did get mad at us~~ would get mad at us.

P: I understand that but this is a civil war. Tell Bill I think he has got a great opportunity here. I would appreciate it if he goes and that if ~~K~~ he does indicate Presidential concern that we have expressed so deeply and we don't want to interfere with internal affairs but he ought to make a little statement about ~~xxxx interest~~ our interest in the humanitarian concern. He must talk to the leaders there. I do know that if we go in and just sort of turn our backs on this think, ~~the~~ Henry, we could look awful bad.

K: You have been getting a lot of mail from Catholic~~x~~ leaders like Father Hessberg.

P: I would like Bill to contact Hessberg and Cardinal Cook. I think it would be very good internal American politics if he could indicate to the Catholics ~~x~~ leaders before he goes that he is going to exert all the influence of the U.S. to render relief.

[Omitted here is information unrelated to Nigeria.]